

## **STRONG SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL GARDENS**

### ***The New Jersey State Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) encourages and supports school gardens.***

Coordinated School Health (CSH) is a model recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to improve student health and learning. The CSH addresses eight interrelated components: health education, physical education, health services, counseling, psychological and social services, nutrition services, school environment, family and community involvement and staff wellness. In July 2010, following a competitive grant application process, the (DHSS) Child and Adolescent Health, began funding three regional grantees and one local grantee. Grants for the NJDHSS, Healthy Schools Grow Healthy Kids were made possible through federal funding. Center for Prevention and Counseling(North), Empower Somerset (Central), AtlantiCare Foundation (South) and one local grantee: Statewide Parent Advocate Network (SPAN). The CSH grantees work directly with 28 partner schools. These schools have agreed to: designate a school health coordinator in each school, establish and maintain a wellness team, conduct FitnessGram pre-post testing, conduct School Health Index (SHI) and develop a School Health Action Plan (SHAP). Some schools have decided to implement a school garden as a means of addressing and teaching about nutrition. Garden based education has been shown to increase student' nutrition knowledge, preference for fruits, and fruit and vegetable intake.

Hands - on learning often works best with children. Therefore, the school gardens provide a perfect venue to teach nutrition education by illustrating where food comes from and how our body uses food. The NJDHSS -CSH Schools have also completed taste –testing and shared healthy recipes incorporating harvested vegetables and herbs.

The current number of garden-based education project is approximately 100.

By teaching children how to grow, prepare, select and consume healthy foods, there is a real opportunity to impact a lifetime of better food choices. School gardens also foster team work and can boost student morale. In Atlantic County, the South Street School, a recipient of \$1,500 garden grant, did just that! It started with Ms. Cuevas, School Garden Instructor. She recruited students, parents, school staff, volunteers from Rutgers and Master Gardeners to construct a 40 x 40 bed at their school. Classes were assigned to tender the garden. Everyone pitched in! The harvest of lettuce, sweet potatoes and herbs fed approximately 450 students and guests. Salad and dressing made from the herbs grown was the highlight of the harvest meal celebration. The menu also included whole wheat rolls, baked chicken and mint tea (the mint was garden grown as well). The school board was so impressed that they allocated funding to construct a fence and provided water source on the garden site. The combined effort of this successful school garden illustrated how the CSH components of nutrition service, physical education and activity, staff wellness and family involvement can result in a healthier school community.

For more information on school gardens call the Child and Adolescent Health Program at (609)292-1723.